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ABSTRACT

A number of the provisions of the "New York State Board of Regents Action Plan To Improve Elementary and Secondary Education Results in New York" and the revised Part 100 of the Education Commissioner's Regulations have implications for the education of gifted students. The provisions include: (1) allowing able students to accelerate so that they can begin high school work in the eighth grade; (2) allowing students to proceed at a pace which challenges them; (3) expanding and improving homework; (4) variances for special programs and special focus schools; (5) student participation in interdisciplinary projects; (6) allowing students to obtain up to 6.5 credits toward graduation through examinations; (7) not requiring a student to remain in high school to complete physical education requirements if he/she has met all other graduation requirements; (8) allowing for interdistrict programs in academic subjects and the arts; and (9) giving students the opportunity to complete the high school program earlier than the regularly scheduled twelfth year. Other developments in New York that will have an impact on gifted education programs are also cited, including the New York State Summer School of Mathematics and Science, and the Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University. (JDD)

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THE REGENTS' ACTION PLAN AND EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED

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THE REGENTS' ACTION PLAN

AND EDUCATION OF THE GIFTED

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The **New York State Board of Regents Action Plan to Improve Elementary and Secondary Education Results in New York** (the Action Plan) and the new **Part 100 of the Commissioner's Regulations** (Part 100) constitute a broad effort to improve education in New York State.

The Regents' Action Plan contains goals for elementary and secondary school students, specific course requirements, a number of generic changes in instruction, and several institutional changes. Since it is a broad plan, little or no mention is made of particular groups or types of students, such as gifted students. For example, on page 10 the Plan states, "A student who is advancing rapidly in the elementary grades should have the opportunity in the secondary-level program to continue that acceleration with the option to complete the diploma earlier than the regularly scheduled twelfth year." This recommendation obviously relates to gifted students, although some students not specifically identified as gifted might accelerate in the way described, and gifted students might be served in ways other than by acceleration. The point to be made, however, is that the lack of prominence of the gifted in the Regents' Action Plan is not to be interpreted as a lack of concern for the well-being of the gifted; the breadth of the Plan encompasses the needs of gifted students as well as those of many other groups.

A number of the provisions of the Action Plan or the new Part 100 have implications for the education of gifted students. By being aware of these provisions, educators can make use of them in educating gifted students. The provisions and their implications are discussed below.

<u>The requirement that able students be allowed to accelerate so that they can begin high school work in the eighth grade.</u>

Many gifted students have the capability of beginning high school work before the traditional time of entry into the high school. How this can best be carried out will depend on the characteristics of individual students and the circumstances of the school district. Ideally, acceleration at the eighth-grade level should be anticipated several years before, so that the upper elementary program and middle school/junior high school program can be adjusted over several grades. This can help avoid acceleration by means of skipping eighth-grade work. For example, the work in grades six, seven, and eight might be compressed into two years, which the gifted student would complete in grades six and seven.

The student's program beyond the eighth grade should also be considered when acceleration is planned. If, for example, a student begins his or her higher mathematics a year early and does not continue math through the twelfth grade, a major result of acceleration may be a one- or two-year gap between his/her high school math and college math courses. This occurs when a student who is very capable in math pursues a major, perhaps in the humanities, which does not require an extensive background in math; therefore, the student is not motivated to take Advanced Placement math in the twelfth grade.

The recommendation that students be allowed to proceed at a pace which challenges them.

This is related to the issue of acceleration. However, it also affects students who may not be accelerated. Provisions might be made for gifted students to move at a more rapid pace than most students within a subject area or a grade level, although they will not be accelerated from one level of the subject to another or from one grade level to another. Gifted students may need less repetition and drill in order to master a concept. This recommendation addresses the importance of departing from whole-class instruction and assignments if those practices tend to hold back gifted students.

The recommendation for expanding and improving homework.

The Action Plan emphasizes the need to make homework ("extra-class work") more effective. This apparently is perceived as a general need. It has special relevance for the gifted. Thoughtfully designed homework can challenge students to pursue learning begun in school and to expand on it. Many gifted students have mastered basic concepts and skills which homework is often designed to reinforce. If so, they are ready to carry out homework assignments designed to allow them to apply their learning to new situations. They can work independently on research projects or community action projects. They can create new products. They can determine the directions they want their learning to take them. Designing homework to address these needs requires more resourcefulness and ingenuity on the part of teachers. The results produced by gifted students make the effort worth while.

The provision for variances for special programs and special focus schools.

The Commissioner of Education may grant variances from the Part 100 Regulations if a variance will allow a school to "implement a program designed to provide excellence in education." Requirements placed on the schools are necessarily oriented toward the program for all students. A program for certain students with certain characteristics may need flexibility not anticipated in the regulations. In order to receive a variance, the district must describe the program or activities

which will be substituted for the requirement and present a plan for determining that the substitute program or activities were effective.

The recommendation that students participate in interdisciplinary projects.

Interdisciplinary projects are especially well-suited for gifted students, many of whom have great capacities for synthesizing diverse kinds of learning. Indeed, several models of gifted programs are based on an interdisciplnary approach.

Aside from its educational benefits, an interdisciplinary approach may allow a student to meet several requirements of the district or the State within one block of time.

The requirement that students be allowed to obtain up to 6 1/2 credits toward graduation through examinations.

Some gifted students may be sufficiently advanced in certain areas that they may be able to demonstrate mastery of those areas without taking a formal course. Many of the provisions of the Action Plan discussed above will have the effect of making more students able to meet requirements through examinations. In addition, opportunities such as the Program for Academically Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University are almost certain to produce a larger and larger number of students who achieve competence in various areas without enrolling in the formal subjects within the public schools.

The new regulation which says the State will not require a student to remain in high school to complete the physical education requirements if he/she has met all other graduation requirements in less than the usual time.

This provision eliminates a possible complication for those students who have completed all other graduation requirements. The Regents anticipated the problem of a student who was accelerated in a number of subjects and obtain course credit in others. This student might have more than enough credits to graduate after finishing the eleventh grade, with the exception of the physical education requirements. By means of this provision, the student can graduate and begin his/her higher education.

The modifications in regulations and law that allow BOCES to offer work in academic subjects and the arts.

A difficulty facing many districts is the lack of a sufficient number of gifted students at a particular level or in a particular subject to make a special program feasible. Under these changes, BOCES may now offer work in academic subjects and the arts, making interdistrict programs possible.

The recommendation that students have the opportunity to complete the high school program earlier than the regularly scheduled twelfth year.

Some gifted students will accumulate sufficient high school credit to graduate after what would ordinarily be the eleventh grade, or perhaps even earlier. This might be done through acceleration, obtaining credit through examinations, taking heavier than average course loads, taking summer work, or a combination of these options. These students should be able to continue studies in the high school setting through such provisions as Advanced Placement courses or move on to higher education or employment.

This recommendation, like several of the recommendations and requirements cited above, is intended to assure that students with particular needs are not underserved because of institutional rigidity.

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In addition to these provisions of the Action Plan and the new Part 100 Regulations, a number of other developments in New York State will have an impact on gifted students and programs for the gifted:

1. In 1988, the Governor proposed and the Legislature passed legislation establishing the New York State Summer School of Mathematics and Science for academically gifted high school students. The program began with a pilot project at three sites in 1988 and was expanded to include approximately 400 students beginning in 1989. The Summer School supplements, but does not replace, the school-year programs for the most able math and science students.

2. The Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University began a systematic talent search in New York State in 1983. Each year, seventh-grade students who have scored at or above the ninety-seventh percentile on standardized tests are invited to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) of the College Board. Those scoring at or above the median score for high school seniors taking the SAT are eligible for special recognition and programs. In 1988-89, more than 4,900 seventh graders in New York State took the SAT. Over the years, a substantial number of New York State students have attended the summer program offered by Johns Hopkins in Baltimore or its satellite program at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs.

These developments, and others perhaps still to come, offer opportunities to expand and improve the services for gifted students.